

John Caldwell Calhoun to Andrew Jackson, December 26, 1817, from Correspondence of Andrew Jackson. Edited by John Spencer Bassett.

SECRETARY CALHOUN TO JACKSON.

Department of War, December 26, 1817.

Sir, You will repair, with as little delay as practicable, to Fort Scott and assume the immediate command of the Forces in that section of the Southern Division.

The increasing display of hostile intentions, by the Seminole Indians, may render it necessary to concentrate all the contiguous and disposable force of your Division, upon that quarter. The regular force now there, is about Eight hundred Strong; and one thousand militia of the State of Georgia are called into Service. General Gaines estimates the Strength of the Indians at two Thousand seven hundred. Should you be of opinion that our numbers are too Small to beat the Enemy, you will call on the Executives of adjacent States for such an additional militia force as you may deem requisite.

General Gaines had been orderred early in last month to repair to Amelia Island.¹ It is presumed that he has, therefore, relinquished the command at Fort Scott. Subsequent orders have been given to General Gaines,² (copies of which will be furnished you) advising him that you would be directed to take command, and directing him to reassume, should he deem the public interest to require it, the command at Fort Scott, until you Should arrive there. If, however, the General should have progressed to Florida before these subsequent orders may have reached him, he was instructed to penetrate to the Seminole Towns, through the Floridas, provided, the Strength of his command, at Amelia, would justify his engaging in offensive operations.

Library of Congress

1 Gaines was ordered, Nov. 12, 1817, to take command of forces at Amelia Island and break up the band assembled there under McGregor, the filibuster.

2 These orders, Dec. 26, 1817, are as follows:

“ . . . Before this will reach you, it is hoped, that the views of the President, in relation to the settlement on Amelia island, will have been effected. Should that be the case, it is his wish, that you should immediately repair to fort Scott, and resume the command, 'till general Jackson's arrival, to whom orders have, this day, been sent to command there; or, if you should think the force under your command sufficient, and other circumstances will admit, to penetrate through Florida, and co-operate in the attack on the Seminoles. I am not sufficiently acquainted with the topography of the country between Amelia and their towns, to say whether it is practicable, or what would be the best route; but it is not improbable, that some advantage might be taken of the St. John's river, to effect the object. Should it be practicable, it is probable efficient aid might be given to the attack on them, as the attention of their warriors must be wholly directed towards fort Scott. Should you think it practicable and advisable to co-operate with the force under your command, you will leave a sufficient number at Amelia island to retain the possession of that place”.

For an understanding of the events that were to follow it is necessary also to read the following order from Calhoun to Gaines, Dec. 16, 1817: “On the receipt of this letter should the Seminole Indians still refuse to make reparation for their outrages and depredations on the citizens of the United States, it is the wish of the President that you consider yourself at liberty to march across the Florida line, and to attack them within its limits, should it be found necessary, unless they shelter themselves under a Spanish fort. In the last event, you will immediately notify this department.”

With this view you may be prepared to concentrate your forces and to adopt the necessary measures to terminate a conflict which it has ever been the desire of the President, from

Library of Congress

considerations of humanity, to avoid; but which is now made necessary by their Settled hostilities.

With great respect I have the honor to be,

[*Indorsement:*] from Secy. of War ordering Genl. J. to proceed to Fort Scott and assume the command at that place 26th Decr. 1817

Recd. 11th Jany. 1818

Ansd. 12th Jany. 1818